

NOTORIOUS 1950s EC COMICS!



NO. 24

JUNE



250

365

CANADA

TALES FROM THE CRYPT

®

FEATURING...



THE CRYPT-KEEPER



THE VAULT-KEEPER



THE OLD WITCH



JACK
DAVIS

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! I SEE YOU'RE *HUNGRY* FOR *HORROR* AGAIN. WELL, REST ASSURED... YOUR *APPETITE* WILL BE *SATISFIED*. IN FACT, WHEN YOU'RE *THROUGH* WITH THIS *PUTRID PERIODICAL*, YOU WILL HAVE *LOST* YOUR *APPETITE ENTIRELY*. SO DON'T JUST STAND THERE *DROOLING*. *COME IN!* WELCOME ONCE MORE TO *THE CRYPT OF TERROR*. THIS IS YOUR *HOST* IN *HOWLS*, YOUR *NAUSEATING NARRATOR*, *THE CRYPT-KEEPER*, READY TO *CHILL YOUR SPINE* AND *CURDLE YOUR BLOOD* WITH THE *SPINE-TINGLING TALE OF TERROR* I CALL...

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



THE EVENING PERFORMANCE IS OVER AND THE CIRCUS GROUNDS ARE SILENT SAVE FOR THE FLAPPING OF CANVAS AND THE OCCASIONAL SNORT OF A CAGED ANIMAL. OVERHEAD, A COLD MOON ILLUMINATES THE MIDNIGHT LANDSCAPE. SUDDENLY, A SHADOWY FIGURE EMERGES FROM ONE OF THE DARKENED TENTS AND GLIDES QUIETLY ACROSS THE MIDWAY... WHISPERING...

ERIC?!

HERE, MARTA...



THE WOMAN PEERS INTO THE SHADOWS, STRAINING TO SEE, HER HEART RACING. THE MAN STEPS INTO THE DIM COLD LIGHT, HIS ARMS EXTENDED...

OH, ERIC, DARLING...

MY DEAREST...

THEY EMBRACE... WARMLY... PASSIONATELY... HUNGRY LIPS... HOLDING CLOSE...

WHAT ABOUT CARL?

HE IS ASLEEP. HE DREAMS OF PARIS AND THE WOMEN HE HAS KNOWN...

THE MAN LOOKS INTO THE WOMAN'S EYES, GREY-GREEN IN THE MOONLIGHT.

BUT... YOU SAID YOU CAN ONLY READ THE THOUGHTS IN HIS MIND HE WANTS YOU TO READ!

HE TAUNTS ME, ERIC. HE HAS ALWAYS TAUNTED ME WITH THIS POWER HE HAS OVER ME!

THE MAN SHAKES HIS HEAD SADLY, STROKING THE WOMAN'S SOFT FLOWING HAIR...

WHY DID YOU EVER MARRY HIM, MARTA?

IT WAS A MISTAKE, ERIC. I MISTOOK THIS FREAK OF NATURE... THIS ONCE IN A LIFETIME OCCURANCE... THIS ABILITY OF CARL'S TO PROJECT THOUGHTS AND MINE TO READ THEM... FOR LOVE!

WE DISCOVERED THIS ABILITY QUITE BY ACCIDENT MANY YEARS AGO. CARL IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZED ITS GREAT VALUE. BEFORE I KNEW IT, WE'D TEAMED UP AS A MIND-READING ACT, JOINED THIS TRAVELING CIRCUS, AND WERE MARRIED...

AND YOU'VE BEEN UNHAPPY EVER SINCE...

MISERABLE! I KNOW NOW THAT CARL NEVER LOVED ME. I WAS HIS SUBJECT... HIS THOUGHT-PROJECTION RECEIVER... A PIECE OF APPARATUS... NOTHING MORE. BUT NOW I KNOW WHAT REAL LOVE IS... NOW THAT I'VE MET YOU.

HE WOULD NEVER LET YOU GO... WOULD HE?

NEVER! IF I GO, HIS ACT GOES. HE'D NEVER GIVE ME A DIVORCE. THERE'S NO USE MY ASKING!

THEN WE WILL RUN AWAY... JOIN ANOTHER CIRCUS. I HAVE HAD MANY OFFERS. AN ANIMAL TRAINER IS IN GREAT DEMAND.

THE WIND SIGNS ACROSS THE CIRCUS GROUNDS, WHISPERS AROUND THE TENT ROPES, GASPS AGAINST THE CANVAS...CARRYING THE SIGNS, THE WHISPERS, THE GASPS OF THE LOVERS IN THE SHADOWS. AND IN HIS TENT, CARL STIRS UNEASILY... OPENS HIS EYES...

MARTA, I... I...
MARTA? MARTA?

HER BED! IT IS EMPTY!
WHERE COULD SHE BE?



CARL SLIPS ON A ROBE AND COMES OUT OF HIS TENT... OUT INTO THE WHISPERING, SIGHING, GASPING WIND...

VOICES! COMING FROM
BEYOND THE NEW ANIMAL
TRAINER'S TENT...

HIS VOICE...AND
MARTA'S!



CARL MOVES THROUGH THE MOON-LIT NIGHT...HIS EYES BURNING LIKE HOT COALS...LISTENING...

...AND AT THE END OF
THE MONTH WHEN I GET
MY CHECK, WE WILL
LEAVE...YOU AND
I...TOGETHER...

OH,
YES...
YES...



...LISTENING TO THE EAGERNESS IN
HIS WIFE'S VOICE...THE PASSION, THE
HUNGER...

...BUT LET'S NOT
TALK ANYMORE,
ERIC, DARLING.
HOLD ME...CLOSE...

SWEET
MARTA...



...AND THEN, SLOWLY, HE RETURNS
TO HIS TENT ONCE MORE. HE HAS
HEARD ENOUGH...

SHE...SHE HAS FALLEN
IN LOVE WITH HIM. SHE
IS LEAVING ME. SHE...
I... I MUST STOP HER!

BUT,
HOW...



THE MOONLIGHT STREAMS THROUGH THE OPEN TENT-FLAP...FALLING ACROSS THE PRINT...BLACK LETTERS ON COLD WHITE... THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER...

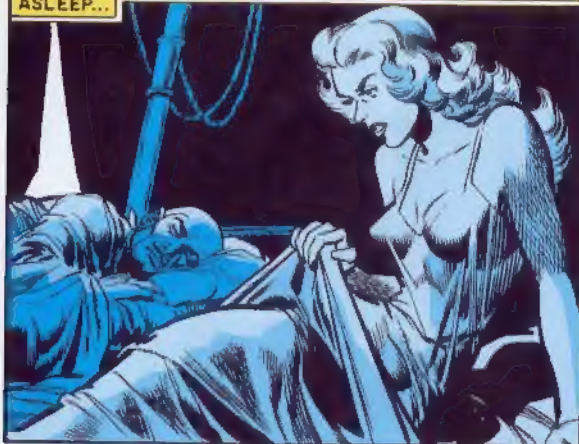
WHAT'S THIS!? 'BODIES DISIN-
TERRED AT LOCAL GRAVE YARD...
TORN TO PIECES AS IF ATTACKED
BY WILD BEAST.'



OF COURSE! "TORN TO PIECES BY WILD BEAST!"
THAT'S HOW I CAN STOP HER FROM LEAVING.
THAT'S IT!



LATER, WHEN MARTA RETURNS FROM HER RENDEZVOUS, AND CRAWLS BACK INTO BED, CARL PRETENDS HE IS ASLEEP...



ONLY AFTER MARTA HAS SLIPPED OFF INTO DEEP SLUMBER, DOES CARL STIR...AND RISE...AND GO OUT OF THE TENT...



... AND CROSS DIRECTLY TO THE NEW ANIMAL TRAINER'S TENT WITH GUN IN HAND...



HUH? WHO'S THERE? WHO...

GET UP! AND DON'T MAKE A SOUND!

ERIC STUMBLES TO HIS FEET. . .



WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS, CARL? PUT DOWN THAT GUN...

SO YOU WERE GOING TO RUN OFF WITH MY WIFE, EH, ERIC? WELL, WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT! MOVE!

CARL MOTIONS ERIC OUT OF THE TENT AND DOWN THE LONG SILENT MIDWAY TOWARD THE BIG-TOP...



WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, CARL?

I, ERIC? I'M NOT GOING TO DO ANYTHING! YOUR LION WILL DO THE WORK!

THEY CROSS THE TANBARK FLOOR OF THE BIG TOP UNTIL THEY COME TO THE LION CAGE. THE TAWNY BEAST PACES BACK AND FORTH HUNGRILY. . .



MY LION!?

YES, ERIC. I'M GOING TO PUT YOU IN THE CAGE WITH HIM. . . WITHOUT YOUR WHIP... WITHOUT ANYTHING... JUST YOU AND YOUR LION!

WITHOUT MY WHIP!? I'D BE HELPLESS...PARALYZED... UNABLE TO DEFEND MYSELF! FOR GOD'S SAKE, CARL! HAVE PITY!



PITY IS AN EMOTION BELONGING TO THE PITIFUL, ERIC. GET IN...

CARL SWINGS OPEN THE BARRED DOOR AND PUSHES. ERIC SCREAMS AND GOES SPRAWLING. THE LION SNARLS...



...AND THEN, THE CIRCUS GROUNDS ECHO WITH THE BLOOD-CURDLING SHRIEKS OF A MAN BEING TORN TO SHREDS BY THE RAZOR SHARP FANGS OF A BLOOD-CRAZED BEAST...



ERIC'S ANGUISHED SHRIEKS AWAKEN MARTA AND SHE LOOKS AROUND WILDLY...

CARL! WHAT WAS THAT?
CARL! CA...



CARL'S BED IS EMPTY! OUTSIDE THE TENT, FOOTSTEPS POUND UP THE MIDWAY TOWARD THE BIG-TOP. MARTA SLIPS ON A ROBE AND BURSTS FROM THE TENT...

WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
DON'T KNOW! IT'S COMIN' FROM THE BIG-TOP!



SHE RUNS WITH THE REST OF THEM... UNTIL THEY COME TO THE LION TRAINER'S CAGE...

GOOD LORD!

ERIC!
ERIC!



SHE SCREAMS HIS NAME TWICE, AND THEN SHE JUST STANDS THERE, WATCHING THE BEAST LICK AT THE SLASHED AND SHREDDED BODY UNTIL SHE HAS TO TURN AWAY AS THE NAUSEA SWEEPS OVER HER...

HOW DID IT HAPPEN?
THE CRAZY FOOL! HE MUST HAVE COME OUT HERE TO PRACTICE HIS ACT!
AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?
CHOKER!



AND THEN, SICK, SHE RETURNS TO HER TENT AND SITS AND WAITS, CRYING, UNTIL CARL COMES IN WITH THAT EVIL GRIN ON HIS COLD IMPASSIVE FACE...

YOU DID IT, DIDN'T YOU! YOU KILLED HIM! YOU KNEW!

DIDN'T YOU HEAR WHAT THEY SAID, MARTA? THEY SAID HE MUST HAVE BEEN PRACTICING HIS ACT!



BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT IN MARTA'S MIND AS TO HOW ERIC DIED. CARL'S BED WAS EMPTY WHEN ERIC'S SCREAMS AWAKENED HER. THE SHEETS WERE COLD.



THE NEXT DAY'S PERFORMANCE IS CANCELLED BECAUSE OF THE TRAGEDY. THE TENTS ARE LOWERED. THE CIRCUS PREPARES TO MOVE ON...



IT HAPPENS SUDDENLY... WITHOUT WARNING, CARL IS HELPING WITH THE DISMANTLING OF THE BIG-TOP WHEN THE MAIN SUPPORT TOPPLES...



THE HEAVY POLE CRASHES DOWNWARD UPON CARL, CRUSHING HIM BENEATH ITS MASSIVE WEIGHT...



AND WHEN THE HUGE SUPPORT IS LIFTED, CARL LIES DEATHLY STILL... HIS GLAZED EYES STARING...



MARTA IS SUMMONED. SHE STANDS IMPASSIVELY OVER HER HUSBAND'S BODY, SHEDDING NO TEARS, SHOWING NO SIGN OF EMOTION...



MARTA'S VOICE IS COLD... CALLOUS... AS SHE ASKS...



MARTA LOOKS DOWN AT THE STILL FORM OF HER HUSBAND LYING ON THE TANBARK FLOOR. AND EVEN THOUGH SHE READS HIS THOUGHTS, SHE SHOWS NO SIGNS OF RECOGNITION...



AS THE UNDERTAKER AND HIS ASSISTANT LIFT POOR CARL INTO THE WICKER, MARTA MOVES FORWARD...



AT THE FUNERAL, MARTA STANDS, HER FACE A GRANITE MASK, BESIDE THE YAWNING PIT BELOW CARL'S COFFIN...



AND EVEN THOUGH THE SOIL IS SHOVELED DOWN UPON THE COFFIN, CARL'S FRANTIC THOUGHT WAVES STILL COME THROUGH TO HER... TO HER AND ONLY HER... TO MARTA, WHO TURNS AND WALKS AWAY DOWN THE PATH LEADING OUT OF THE CEMETERY...



THE AFTERNOON WANES. THE NIGHT BREEZE COMES UP, WHISPERING OVER THE GRAVE MOUNDS. SIX FEET BELOW, IN HIS COFFIN, CARL CONCENTRATES AS THE PRECIOUS OXYGEN SLOWLY DISAPPEARS...

MARTA! COME BACK! COME SAVE ME! I'LL DO ANYTHING! ANYTHING! HAVE PITY ON ME! HAVE PITY!



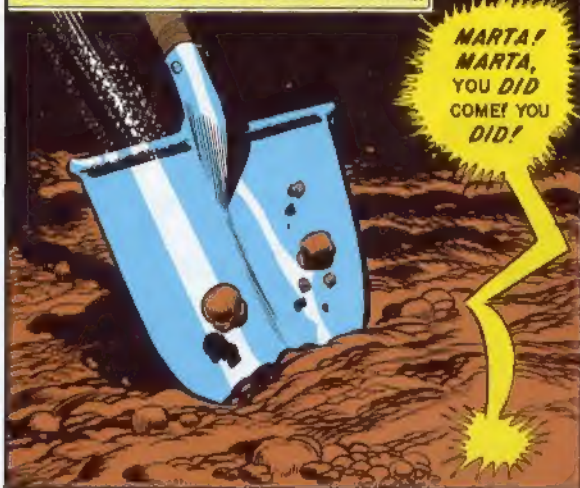
THE STARS COME OUT, WHITE PIN-POINTS IN A VELVET SHROUD. A FIGURE MOVES OVER THE GRAVE MOUNDS...

I KNOW YOU ARE RECEIVING MY THOUGHTS, MARTA! I KNOW...



A SHOVEL DIGS INTO THE SOFT EARTH...

MARTA! MARTA, YOU DID COME! YOU DID!



THE DIGGING CONTINUES, THE SHOVEL SCOOPING AWAY THE SOFT EARTH. FINALLY THE LID OF THE COFFIN SWINGS BACK...

MARTA! DARLING! I... OH, LORD... YOU'RE NOT MARTA!



AND THEN AS CARL LIES HELPLESS...PARALYZED...LIKE A LION-TAMER WITHOUT A WHIP...FEELING THE RAZOR SHARP TEETH RIPPING AND TEARING AT HIS FLESH...UNABLE TO SCREAM AT THE EXCRUCIATING PAIN, HE THINKS OF THE NEWSPAPER LYING IN THE MOONLIGHT...THE NEWSPAPER THAT FIRST GAVE HIM THE IDEA OF HOW TO KILL ERIC...

'BODIES DISINTERRED AT LOCAL GRAVE YARD... TORN TO PIECES AS IF ATTACKED BY SOME WILD BEAST!' OH, LORD! THEY WERE WRONG! THIS IS NO BEAST! IT'S A GHOUL!



HEH, HEH! YEP, KIDDIES! CARL ENDED UP **JUST LIKE ERIC**... BEING **TORN TO BITS** AND **UNABLE** TO DEFEND HIMSELF. AS FOR MARTA...SHE READ CARL'S **FINAL THOUGHTS**, AND GOT **QUITE A MENTAL PICTURE** OF WHAT WAS **GOING ON!** JUST **ONE MORE THOUGHT** ON THIS WHOLE SUBJECT: AS THE **BOP CEMETERY FOREMAN** KEEPS TELLING HIS **WORK CREWS**, **'DIG THAT CRA-AZY GRAVE!'** WELL, V.K. AWAITS, SO... **'BYE, NOW!'**



THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH! SALUTATIONS, SLIME SAVORERS!! NOW IT'S TIME FOR A JAUNT INTO THE VAULT OF HORROR. THIS IS YOUR HOST IN HOWLS, THE VAULT-KEEPER, READY TO ENTERTAIN YOU IN C.K.'S MAG WITH A FAVORITE YELP-YARN FROM MY CREEP-COLLECTION. SO HAVE THE BICARB READY AND I'LL UPSET YOUR STOMACH WITH THE TUMMY-TURNER I CALL...

PEARLY TO DEAD

OUR STORY BEGINS DURING WORLD WAR II, WHEN THE UNITED STATES MARINES WERE SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY INCHING ACROSS THE SOUTH PACIFIC AREA, INVADING AND BATTLING FOR EACH BLOODY ATOLL, EACH JAPANESE-INFESTED CORAL ROCK. ONE INKY BLACK STARLESS NIGHT, A SMALL BOAT MOVED SILENTLY TOWARD THE CORAL REEF THAT RINGED THE PEACEFUL LAGOON OF ONE OF THESE JAPANESE-HELD ISLANDS. INSIDE, TWO MEN CROUCHED QUIETLY, STUDYING THE DANCING FIRES ON THE SHORE ACROSS THE PLACID LAGOON...

BETTER DROP THE ANCHOR, PHIL. THIS IS ABOUT AS CLOSE IN AS WE DARE GO WITHOUT BEING SEEN.

RIGHT, LARRY.



THE ANCHOR SLID OVER THE SMALL BOAT'S SIDE AND DROPPED WITH A MUFFLED SPLASH INTO THE BLACK PACIFIC. THEN, STRANGELY, THE TWO MEN BEGAN TO UNDRESS...

WHILE I'M CLEARING THE STEEL NETTING, YOU START SETTING THE DEMOLITION CHARGES, PHIL.

CHECK!



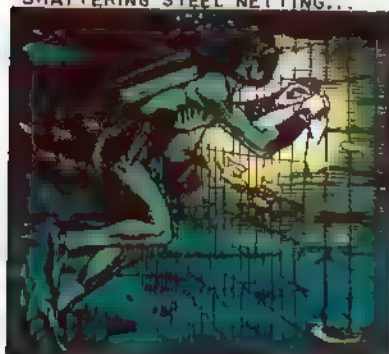
THEY STOOD ALMOST NAKED IN THE PACIFIC NIGHT, MUSCLES RIPPLING. THEY BENT AND SLID THE WEIRDLY SHAPED BLACK RUBBER FLIPPERS ONTO THEIR FEET...PULLED THEIR RUBBER MASKS WITH THE ROUND GLASS WINDOWS OVER THEIR FACES...



SILENTLY, THE TWO MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY'S UNDERWATER DEMOLITION TEAM... THE FABULOUS FROGMEN... SLID OVER THE SIDE OF THEIR SMALL BOAT AND INTO THE CHOPPY PACIFIC...



... AND WENT ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS. ...THE BUSINESS OF CLEARING THE WAY FOR THE INVASION OF THE FOLLOWING MORNING. THE ONE NAMED LARRY GLIDED DOWNWARD, FLICKING ON HIS LAMP, SEARCHING OUT THE TREACHEROUS PROPELLER-SHATTERING STEEL NETTING...



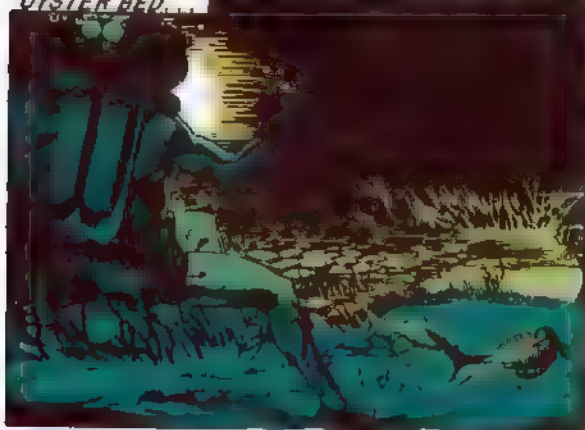
... AS THE OTHER, THE ONE NAMED PHIL, SKIMMED BELOW THE SURFACE TO THE PILINGS SUNK IN THE LAGOON FLOOR



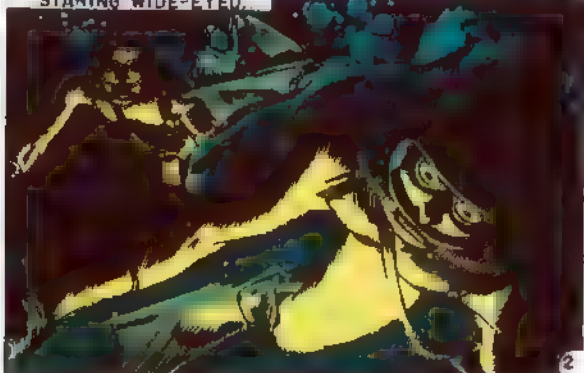
WITH THE NETTING CLIPPED AND SAWED AND CUT AWAY AND RENDERED HARMLESS, LARRY SHOT TOWARDS PHIL TO HELP PLACE THE DEMOLITION CHARGES, HIS LANTERN BEAM RUNNING ACROSS THE SANDY BOTTOM OF THE LAGOON...



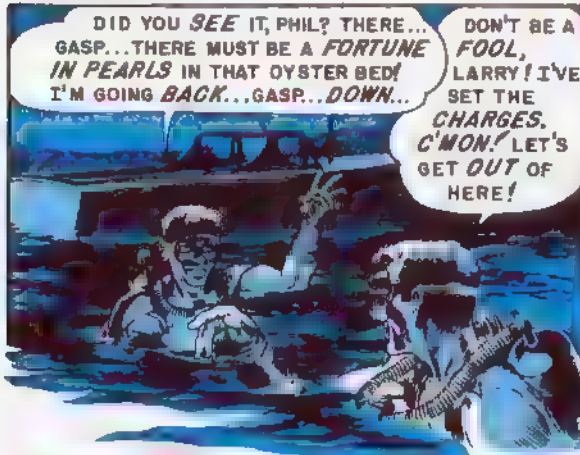
AND THEN, SUDDENLY, HE SAW IT...STRETCHING AWAY BELOW HIM IN THE GLOOMY MURKY DARKNESS... THE OYSTER BED...



AS LARRY CIRCLED OVER THE BED, STUDYING THE ABNORMALLY-LARGE SHELLED SEA CREATURES WITH THEIR PRICELESS GLOBED GEMS IMBEDDED IN THEIR QUIVERING MEATY BODIES, PHIL GLIDED TOWARD HIM, STARING WIDE-EYED.



THE TWO MEN SURFACED BESIDE THEIR BOAT, GASPING FOR BREATH...



DID YOU SEE IT, PHIL? THERE... GASP... THERE MUST BE A FORTUNE IN PEARLS IN THAT OYSTER BED! I'M GOING BACK... GASP... DOWN...

DON'T BE A FOOL, LARRY! I'VE SET THE CHARGES. C'MON! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

MINUTES LATER, THE SMALL BOAT WAS HUMMING SEAWARD. BEHIND, THE DEMOLITION CHARGES EXPLODED IN THE PLACID LAGOON SIGNALLING THE MIGHTY BATTLE WAGONS OFFSHORE TO BEGIN THEIR BARRAGE. LARRY SWORE ABOVE THE DIN...



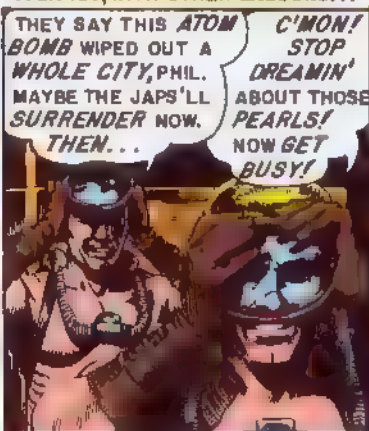
WE'LL COME BACK, PHIL! AFTER THIS CRAZY MESS IS OVER, WE'LL COME BACK FOR THOSE PEARLS. WE'LL BE RICH!

SURE, LARRY! SURE...

AT DAWN THE NEXT MORNING, THE ASSAULT BOATS STORMED THE QUIET LAGOON, AND PROPELLERS CHURNED BLOOD INTO THE WATERS ABOVE THE OYSTER BED...



THE BEACHHEAD WAS SECURED. THE DEMOLITION TEAM'S WORK WAS DONE. LARRY AND PHIL WERE SHIPPED ELSEWHERE TO OTHER ISLANDS, WITH OTHER LAGOONS...



THEY SAY THIS ATOM BOMB WIPED OUT A WHOLE CITY, PHIL. MAYBE THE JAPS'LL SURRENDER NOW. THEN...

C'MON! STOP DREAMIN' ABOUT THOSE PEARLS! NOW GET BUSY!

V-J DAY! PEACE! IT CAME SUDDENLY... AFTER THE SECOND A-BOMB WAS DROPPED. THE JAPANESE SIGNED AN UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER AND THE WAR WAS OVER...



HEY, PHIL! SHIPPING ORDERS! WE'RE GOING HOME! WE'RE GETTING OUT!

LET'S SEE...

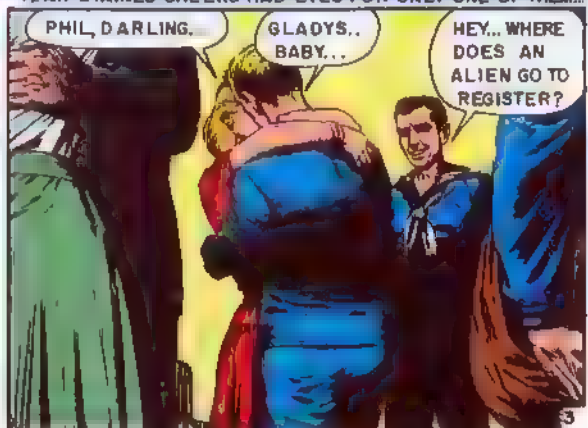
SAN FRANCISCO'S GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE CAME UP OUT OF THE MIST ONE MORNING. THE TROOPSHIP SLIPPED BENEATH IT AND NOSED IN TOWARDS A PIER WHERE BANDS PLAYED AND CHILDREN CHEERED AND WOMEN SOBBED HAPPILY.



LOOK, PHIL! THERE'S GLADYS!

GLADYS? WHERE?

THEY CAME DOWN THE GANGPLANK TOGETHER, SIDE BY SIDE, LARRY AND PHIL BUT THE GIRL THAT WAITED WITH TEAR-STAINED CHEEKS HAD EYES FOR ONLY ONE OF THEM...

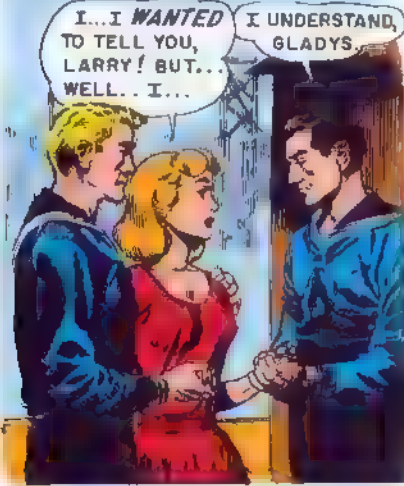


PHIL, DARLING...

GLADYS.. BABY...

HEY... WHERE DOES AN ALIEN GO TO REGISTER?

LARRY TRIED TO HIDE THE JEALOUS ANGER...THE HURT THAT HE FELT. GLADY'S PREFERENCE HAD COME AS A GREAT SHOCK TO HIM...



I...I WANTED TO TELL YOU, LARRY! BUT... WELL... I...

I UNDERSTAND, GLADYS.

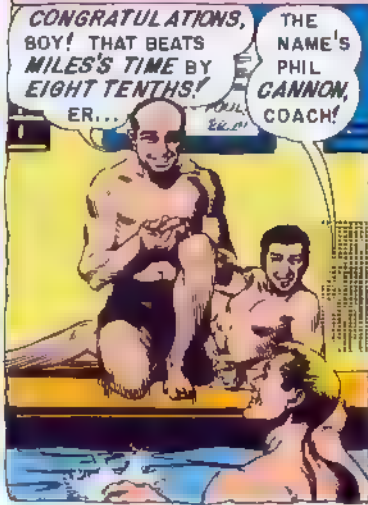
PHIL HAD WON AGAIN IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THAT .EVER SINCE THEIR COLLEGE DAYS. THEY'D BOTH COME OUT FOR THE SWIM TEAM...



THAT'S GOOD TIME, SON! ER WHAT DID YOU SAY YOUR NAME WAS?

LARRY! LARRY MILES!

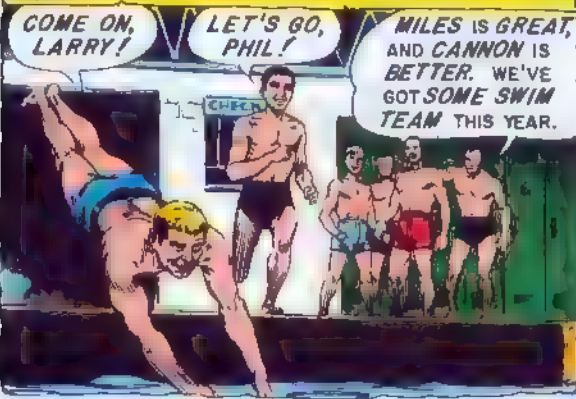
LARRY'D DONE HIS BEST. BUT PHIL... PHIL HAD DONE JUST A WEE BIT BETTER .



CONGRATULATIONS, BOY! THAT BEATS MILES'S TIME BY EIGHT TENTHS! ER...

THE NAME'S PHIL CANNON, COACH!

LARRY AND PHIL HAD BECOME FAST FRIENDS IN COLLEGE. BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS THAT RIVALRY BETWEEN THEM...

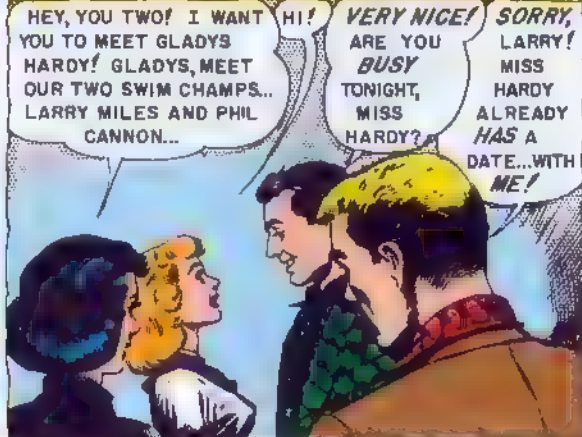


COME ON, LARRY!

LET'S GO, PHIL!

MILES IS GREAT, AND CANNON IS BETTER. WE'VE GOT SOME SWIM TEAM THIS YEAR.

... NOT ONLY IN THE POOL .BUT ALSO ON THE CAMPUS...

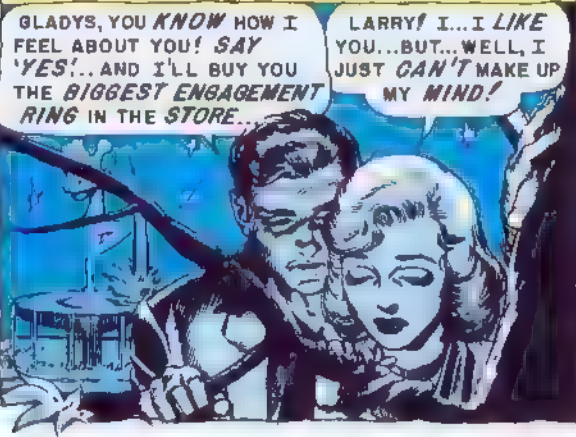


HEY, YOU TWO! I WANT YOU TO MEET GLADYS HARDY! GLADYS, MEET OUR TWO SWIM CHAMPS... LARRY MILES AND PHIL CANNON...

HI! VERY NICE! ARE YOU BUSY TONIGHT, MISS HARDY?

SORRY, LARRY! MISS HARDY ALREADY HAS A DATE...WITH ME!

WHEN GLADYS HAD COME INTO THEIR LIVES, THE RIVALRY BETWEEN THE TWO BOYS HAD INCREASED. THEY BOTH FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER...



GLADYS, YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU! SAY 'YES'! AND I'LL BUY YOU THE BIGGEST ENGAGEMENT RING IN THE STORE...

LARRY! I...I LIKE YOU...BUT...WELL, I JUST CAN'T MAKE UP MY MIND!

THEN, PEARL HARBOR, AND THE U.S. WAS IN A WAR. THE NAVY HAD COME TO LARRY AND PHIL... ASKED THEM TO JOIN THE UNDERWATER DEMOLITION TEAM. AND THEY'D ACCEPTED.

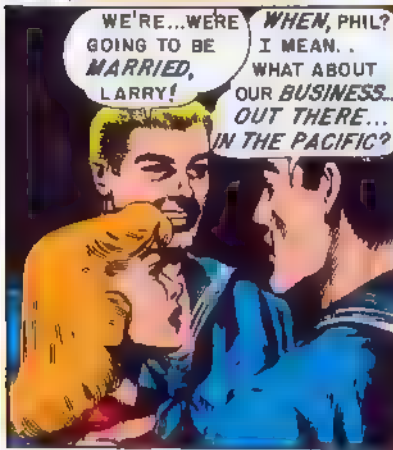


SO LONG, BABY!

WRITE!

I WILL! GOOD-BYE, BOYS! TAKE CARE

AND NOW THEY WERE BACK FROM THE WAR, STANDING ON A JAMMED PIER FULL OF RETURNED SAILORS AND SOLDIERS AND HAPPY LOVED ONES, AND PHIL HAD WON AGAIN...



WE'RE...WERE GOING TO BE MARRIED, LARRY!

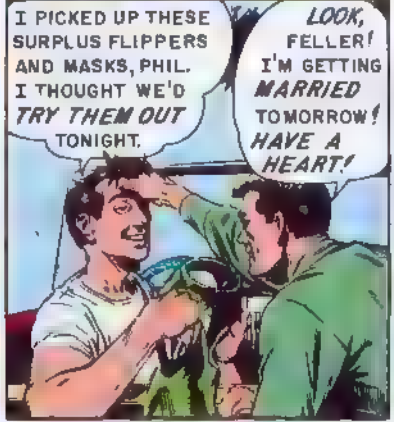
WHEN, PHIL? I MEAN... WHAT ABOUT OUR BUSINESS OUT THERE... IN THE PACIFIC?



IT'LL BE A LOVELY PLACE TO TAKE GLADYS ON OUR HONEYMOON, LARRY.

OH...SURE! SURE! WELL, CONGRATULATIONS, YOU TWO!

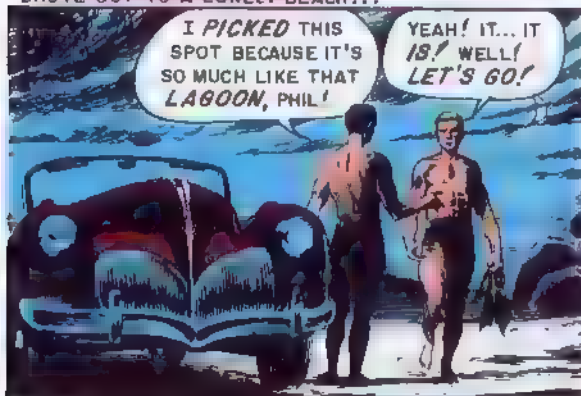
DISCHARGE! CIVILIAN CLOTHES AGAIN! FREEDOM FROM REGIMENTATION.. DISCIPLINE! THEY WERE ALL LARRY'S NOW, AND A SECRET, TOO! A MILLION DOLLAR SECRET! JUST ONE THING... ONE THING WASN'T HIS, YET! GLADYS!...



I PICKED UP THESE SURPLUS FLIPPERS AND MASKS, PHIL. I THOUGHT WE'D TRY THEM OUT TONIGHT.

LOOK, FELLER! I'M GETTING MARRIED TOMORROW! HAVE A HEART!

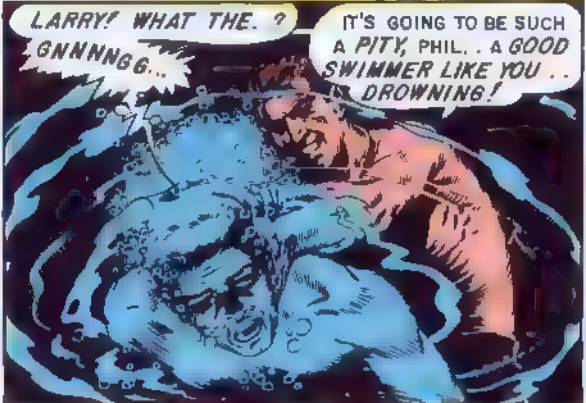
LARRY CONVINCED PHIL THAT AFTER HE WAS MARRIED THERE'D BE NO CHANCE TO TRY OUT THEIR EQUIPMENT, AND PHIL RELUCTANTLY AGREED. THEY DROVE OUT TO A LONELY BEACH...



I PICKED THIS SPOT BECAUSE IT'S SO MUCH LIKE THAT LAGOON, PHIL!

YEAH! IT... IT IS! WELL! LET'S GO!

LARRY HAD PLANNED IT ALL SO CAREFULLY! WITH PHIL DEAD, GLADYS...THE SECRET OF THE PEARL-BED... EVERYTHING.. WOULD BE HIS...



LARRY! WHAT THE. ? GNNNGG...

IT'S GOING TO BE SUCH A PITY, PHIL... A GOOD SWIMMER LIKE YOU... IS DROWNING!

THEY STRUGGLED WILDLY, THERE IN THE FOAMING SURF OF THAT LONELY CALIFORNIA BEACH. LARRY HELD PHIL'S THROAT IN A VICE-LIKE GRIP, UNTIL PHIL'S BODY WENT LIMP AND LIFE LEFT IT AND IT SLIPPED FROM LARRY'S GRASP AND SANK BENEATH THE OCEAN WAVES..



AND LARRY CAME OUT OF THE WATER ALONE WITH A GRIM SMILE ON HIS FACE AND THE STORY HE'D TELL GLADYS SO CLEAR IN HIS MIND...



GLADYS LISTENED TO LARRY AS HE SOBBED OUT THE STORY OF HOW THEY'D GONE SWIMMING...HE AND PHIL...AND PHIL'D GONE DOWN...AND

...AND BEFORE I COULD GET TO HIM, HE WENT DOWN FOR GOOD. HE... HE MUST HAVE GOTTEN A CRAMP. I...I TRIED TO DIVE FOR HIM...BUT THE UNDERTOW...

NO!
SOB...
NO. OH,
LORD!



IT WOULD TAKE TIME LARRY DECIDED. TIME FOR GLADYS TO FORGET PHIL. IN THE MEANWHILE, HE WOULD GO TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC... TO THE TINY ATOLL WITH ITS FABULOUS OYSTER BED... AND MAKE HIS FORTUNE...

I'LL BE BACK IN THREE MONTHS, GLADYS. PERHAPS, BY THEN, YOU WILL HAVE GOTTEN OVER THIS, AND MAYBE I. YOU AND I.

I'LL NEVER STOP LOVING HIM, LARRY! SOB! NEVER.



THE TRIP TO THE ATOLL WAS LONG, BUT LARRY DIDN'T MIND IT. ONCE ON BOARD, HE LOST NO TIME IN MAKING FRIENDS...

BABY, YOU'RE THE MOST GORGEOUS DOLL ON THIS SHIP! I. I...GASP.

WELL... GO ON...DON'T JUST LEAVE ME HANGING!



WERE HIS EYES DECEIVING HIM? WAS THE FOAM AND THE SPRAY AND THE CHURNING WATER BESIDE THE SHIP PLAYING TRICKS ON HIM, OR DID HE ACTUALLY SEE THE BLOATED WHITE BODY?...

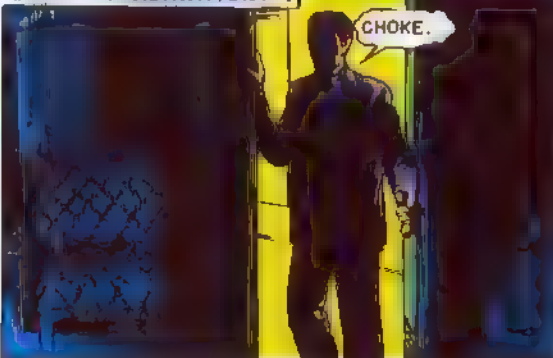
WHAT IS IT, LARRY?

THERE! IN THE WATER! I...I...NO! IT CAN'T BE! I MUST BE SEEING THINGS!



AND WAS THE FOUL ODOR OF THE SEA AND DECAY AND ROTTING FLESH THAT SEARED HIS NOSTRILS WHEN HE OPENED HIS CABIN DOOR THAT NIGHT JUST LARRY'S IMAGINATION?

CHOKED.



WAS IT A DREAM? OR DID LARRY ACTUALLY SEE THE WHITE PULPY FISH-PITTED FACE IN THE PORTHOLE THAT NIGHT WHEN HE'D BEEN STARTLED OUT OF A SOUND SLEEP...

HUH? WHO...WHO...GOOD LORD!



AND WAS IT THE SEA, OR DID HE ACTUALLY HEAR THAT LAUGHTER. THAT RIPPLING BLOOD-CURLING LAUGHTER COMING IN FROM THE MURKY FOG BEYOND THE SHIP THE NIGHT HE STROLLED THE DECK ALONE.

WHO...WHO'S OUT THERE?



THE SHIP DOCKED AT TAHITI AND LARRY LOST NO TIME IN HIRING A PLANE TO TAKE HIM SOUTH TO THE ATOLL...



CAN YOU **LAND** THIS CRATE IN A **LAGOON**?

I CAN DROP IT ON A **DIME**, MISTER!

ON THAT PLANE TRIP SOUTH... SKIMMING LOW OVER THE BLUE PACIFIC... WAS LARRY CRAZY... OR DID HE SEE IT AGAIN... THERE JUST BELOW HIM... THAT **ASHEN, PULPY, BLOATED FORM**...



S'MATTER, MISTER CANNON? **AIR SICK?**

CHOKER... A **LITTLE**, I GUESS.

THE ATOLL CAME UP... A PEARL AGAINST A BLUE SATIN SEA-LINING... GUARDING ITS **OWN PEARL TREASURE**. LARRY CAST HIS FEARS FROM HIS MIND WHEN HE SAW IT...



THERE IT IS! LAND IN THAT LAGOON!

RIGHT!

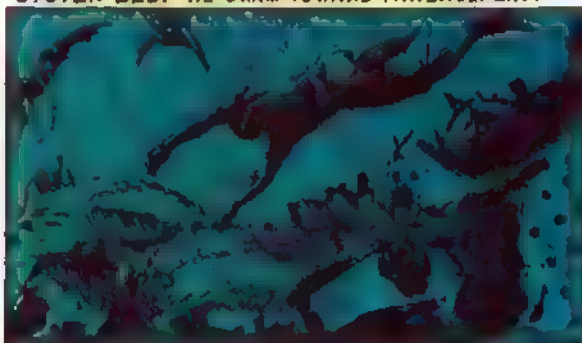
THE TINY SEAPLANE CAME DOWN GENTLY AND SAT BOBBING QUIETLY IN THE BLUE LAGOON AS LARRY UNPACKED HIS GEAR, REMOVED THE FLIPPERS AND THE RUBBER GLASS-WINDOWED MASK, AND BEGAN TO UNDRESS...



HEY! WHAT'S GOING **ON**? YOU GOING TO **DIVE** FOR SOMETHING?

YEP! THERE'S AN **OYSTER BED** IN THIS LAGOON.. WITH **PEARLS THE SIZE OF YOUR FIST**. AND I'M GOING TO **GET ME A FEW**...

TINY FISH SCATTERED BEFORE HIM AS LARRY SHOT DOWNWARD. HE PASSED THE OLD RUSTED NETTINGS... THE SUNKEN ASSAULT BOATS... THE WATER-LOGGED BLASTED PILINGs, AND THEN HE SAW IT. **THE OYSTER BED**. HE SWAM TOWARD IT... EAGERLY...



LARRY WAS SO BUSY WRENCHING THE LARGEST OYSTER HE COULD FIND FROM THE SANDY BOTTOM THAT HE NEVER NOTICED THE PUTRID, SLIMY, WHITE FORM DRIFT TOWARD HIM. AND WHEN ITS BLOATED ARMS CLOSED AROUND HIS NECK, AND THE ROTTED FACE GRINNED AT HIM, **IT WAS TOO LATE...**



PHIL... **CHOKER**... **BLUGG...**

HEH, HEH! YEP, KIDDIES! THAT'S MY YARN. THE **PILOT** OF THE SEAPLANE WAITED AROUND FOR LARRY TO COME UP FOR **SEVERAL HOURS**. FINALLY, HE SHRUGGED, WENT THROUGH LARRY'S PANTS, EXTRACTED THE MONEY FROM HIS WALLET, TOSSED THE REST OF LARRY'S GEAR INTO THE LAGOON, AND **TOOK OFF** AND YOU'LL TAKE OFF WHEN YOU READ THE **NEXT VAULT - KEEPER YARN!** HEH...HEH! NOW

I'LL TURN YOU BACK TO **C.K.!** I'LL SEE YOU **NEXT IN MY MAG, THE VAULT OF HORROR!** 'BYE! E.C., THAT IS!



HERE'S A BUBBLY LITTLE TALE OF
TITANIC TERROR! I CALL IT...

PRAIRIE SCHOONER



MILDRED JACKSON FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR OF HER HOUSE AND SQUEALED WITH JOY. HE STOOD ON THE PAINT-STARVED FRONT PORCH, DRESSED RESPLENDENTLY IN HIS CAPTAIN'S UNIFORM, HIS FACE BRONZED FROM FORTY YEARS AT SEA, HIS EYES COLD AND SQUINTING, HIS MOUTH GRIM, HIS TWO SUIT CASES BESIDE HIM...

EZRA! EZRA! WHY DIDN'T YOU WRITE ME YOU WERE COMING TO VISIT?! OH, EZRA. IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

HELLO, MILLY. GOT A PLACE FOR YER OLD SEA DOG BROTHER TO BUNK DOWN FOR A SPELL?



MILLY LED EZRA INTO THE PARLOR...

THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM FOR YOU HERE, EZRA. YOU KNOW THAT. HOW LONG WILL YOU STAY?

JUST A SPELL, MILLY. JUST TILL I DECIDE WHAT I'M GOIN' T' DO NEXT. Y'SEE... THEY TOOK AWAY MY SHIP. THEY RETIRED ME.



RETIRED...OH, EZRA. I'M SO SORRY.

YEP, MY SAILIN' DAYS ARE OVER, MILLY. I'M A LAND-LUBBER, NOW. WELL, WHERE DO I STOW MY GEAR?



THAT WAS HOW EZRA JACKSON CAME TO LIVE WITH HIS SISTER MILDRED. AT *FIRST*, MILLY WAS VERY HAPPY TO *HAVE* HIM. AFTER ALL, SHE WAS AN *OLD MAID*...AND EZRA WAS COMPANY. BUT AS *TIME* WENT ON, EZRA BEGAN TO DO *STRANGE THINGS*...



EZRA! WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT THROUGH YOUR *SPY-GLASS*?

HUH?



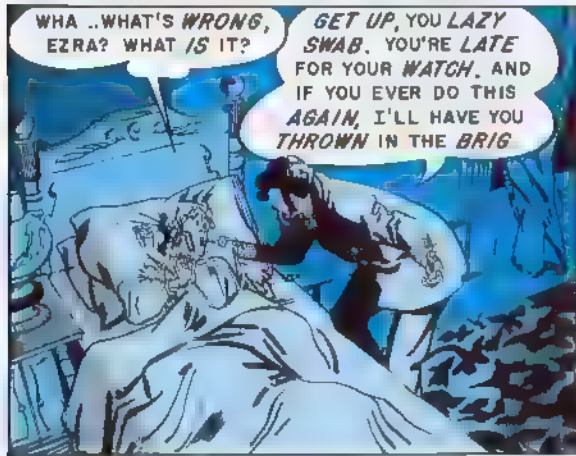
I SAID WHAT ARE YOU *LOOKING* AT WITH YOUR *SPY-GLASS*?

N-NOTHING, MILLY! I WAS JUST WATCHING THAT *SHIP*. ON THE *HORIZON*!



SHIP??BUT... EZRA! THIS IS *KANSAS*! THERE *AREN'T* ANY SHIPS ON THE HORIZON. THERE *ISN'T* ANY *WATER*... FOR *HUNDREDS* OF MILES!

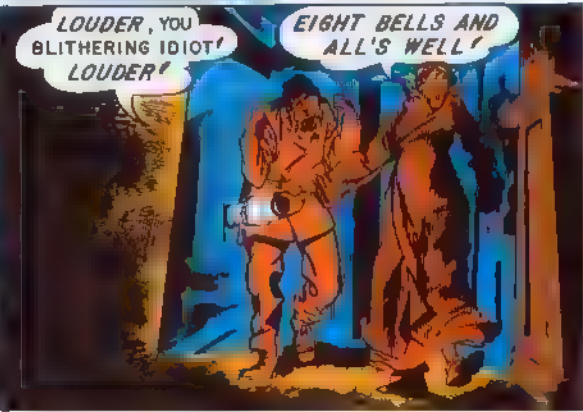
ONE NIGHT, MILLY WAS ROUSED OUT OF A SOUND SLEEP BY HEAVY PAWS SHAKING HER ROUGHLY...



WHA...WHAT'S *WRONG*, EZRA? WHAT *IS* IT?

GET UP, YOU *LAZY SWAB*. YOU'RE *LATE* FOR YOUR *WATCH*. AND IF YOU EVER DO THIS *AGAIN*, I'LL HAVE YOU *THROWN* IN THE *BRIG*

FROM THAT NIGHT ON, MILLY WAS FORCED TO "STAND WATCH". SHE HAD TO MOVE THROUGH THE HALLS OF THE OLD HOUSE FROM TWO A.M. TO DAWN, CARRYING A LANTERN AND SHOUTING



LOUDER, YOU BLITHERING IDIOT! LOUDER!

EIGHT BELLS AND ALL'S WELL!

IT WAS OBVIOUS TO POOR MILLY THAT HER OLDER BROTHER WAS ILL... MENTALLY ILL. THE SHOCK OF BEING RETIRED HAD BEEN TOO MUCH FOR HIM. HIS MIND HAD SNAPPED. HE FANCIED HIMSELF AT SEA AGAIN... THE HOUSE, HIS SHIP...AND SHE, HIS CREW...



YOU CALL THIS *CLEAN*? I WANT THIS DECK SCRUBBED TILL I CAN SEE MY *REFLECTION*! UNDERSTAND?

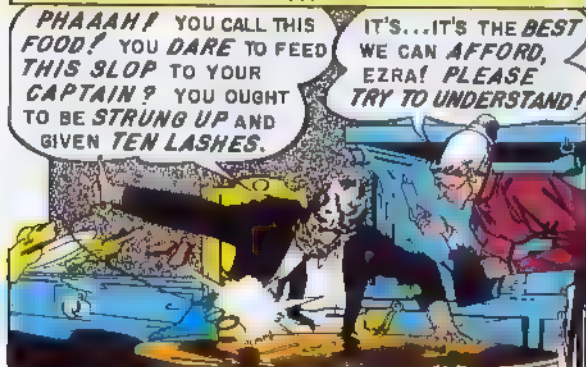
YES, EZRA!

DON'T "EZRA" ME! IT'S "YES, CAPTAIN JACKSON!" REMEMBER THAT! NOW, GET TO WORK, YOU BILGE RAT!

Y-YES, CAPTAIN, JACKSON.



MILLY HAD BEEN A SCHOOL TEACHER IN HER YOUNGER YEARS. SHE'D WORKED HARD AND MANAGED TO SAVE A SMALL AMOUNT OF MONEY. SHE'D USED PART OF IT TO BUY THE HOUSE SHE NOW LIVED IN. THE REST, SHE'D INVESTED WISELY, AND SHE'D BEEN ABLE TO LIVE COMFORTABLY, BUT WITH EZRA'S ARRIVAL, HER MEAGER INCOME WAS NOT ENOUGH...



PHAAAH! YOU CALL THIS FOOD! YOU DARE TO FEED THIS SLOP TO YOUR CAPTAIN? YOU OUGHT TO BE STRUNG UP AND GIVEN TEN LASHES.

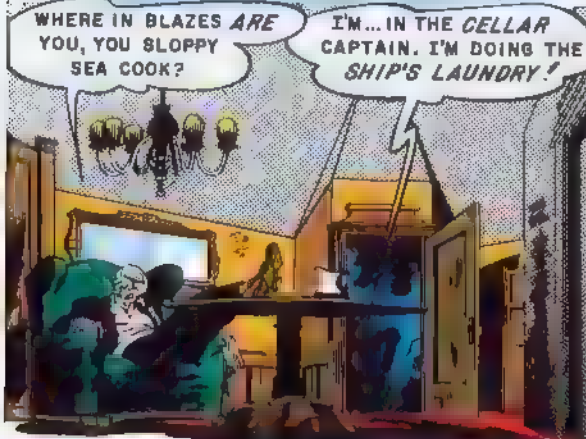
IT'S...IT'S THE BEST WE CAN AFFORD, EZRA! PLEASE TRY TO UNDERSTAND!



I UNDERSTAND ONE THING, YOU GALLEY PIG, EITHER THE FOOD IMPROVES, OR IT'S IRONS FOR YOU. AND IT'S "CAPTAIN JACKSON"! Y'HEAR?

Y-YES, CAPTAIN JACKSON!

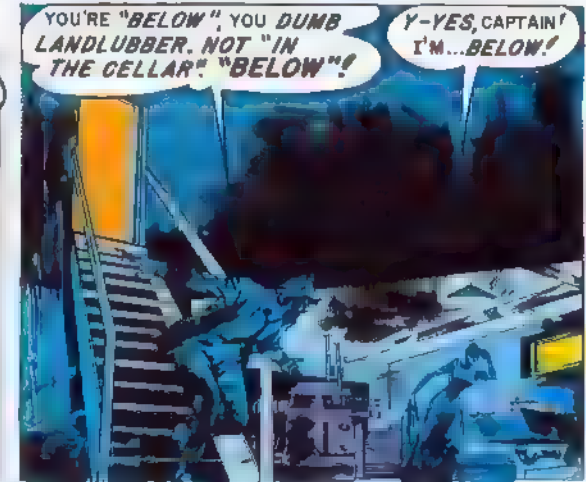
SO MILLY WAS FORCED TO EARN EXTRA MONEY TO AUGMENT THE SMALL INCOME SHE DERIVED FROM HER INVESTMENTS. SHE HAD TO TAKE IN WASHING...



WHERE IN BLAZES ARE YOU, YOU SLOPPY SEA COOK?

I'M...IN THE CELLAR CAPTAIN. I'M DOING THE SHIP'S LAUNDRY!

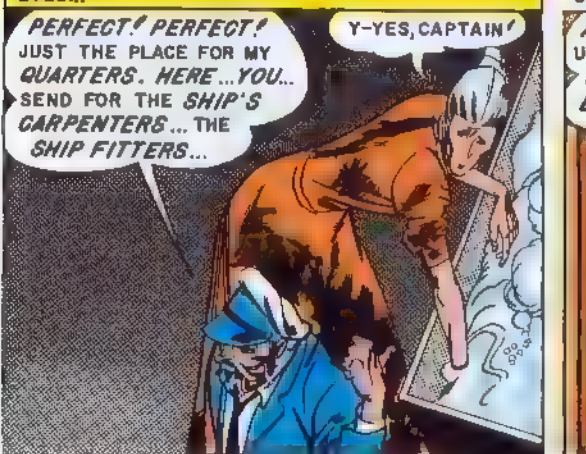
EZRA CAME DOWN THE CELLAR STAIRS, SCREAMING...



YOU'RE "BELOW", YOU DUMB LANDLUBBER. NOT "IN THE CELLAR". "BELOW"!

Y-YES, CAPTAIN! I'M...BELOW!

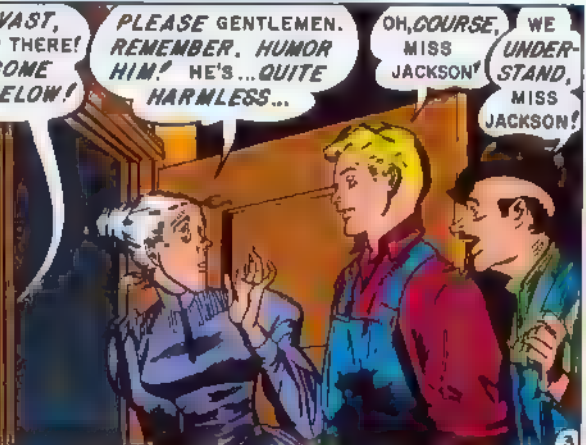
EZRA STOOD IN THE CENTER OF THE CELLAR FLOOR, STARING ABOUT HIM WITH WIDE GLEAMING EYES...



PERFECT! PERFECT! JUST THE PLACE FOR MY QUARTERS. HERE...YOU... SEND FOR THE SHIP'S CARPENTERS... THE SHIP FITTERS...

Y-YES, CAPTAIN!

MILLY WAS HELPLESS. SHE HAD NO OTHER CHOICE... EXCEPT, PERHAPS, TO HAVE EZRA PUT AWAY. SO SHE CALLED IN A CARPENTER...A PLUMBER...



AVAST, UP THERE! GONE BELOW!

PLEASE GENTLEMEN. REMEMBER. HUMOR HIM! HE'S...QUITE HARMLESS...

OH, COURSE, WE UNDERSTAND, MISS JACKSON!

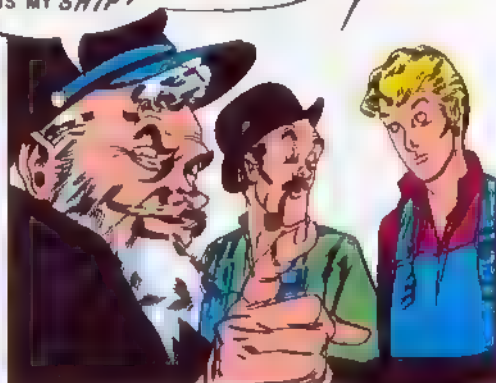
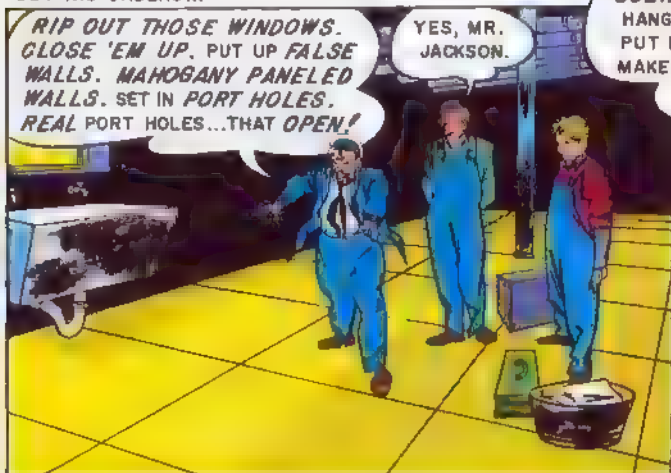
EZRA STORMED ABOUT IN THE CELLAR, SHOUTING OUT HIS ORDERS...

RIP OUT THOSE WINDOWS. CLOSE 'EM UP. PUT UP FALSE WALLS. MAHOGANY paneled walls. SET IN PORT HOLES. REAL PORT HOLES...THAT OPEN!

YES, MR. JACKSON.

CAPTAIN JACKSON PUT OCEAN SCENES BEHIND THE PORT HOLES. HANG SHIP'S LANTERNS AROUND. PUT IN A BUNK A GALLEY A HEAD. MAKE EVERYTHING AUTHENTIC. THIS IS MY SHIP!

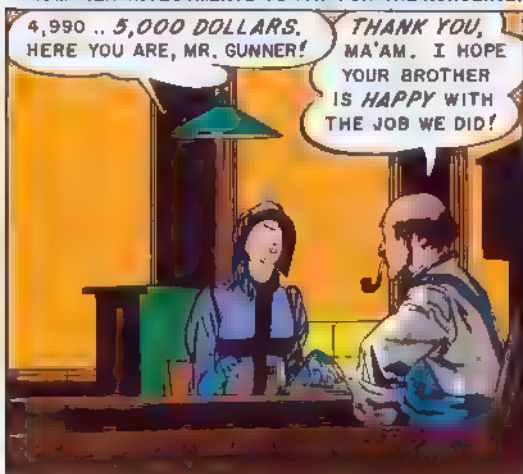
YES, CAPTAIN!



AND POOR MILLY WITHDREW HER LIFE'S SAVINGS FROM HER INVESTMENTS TO PAY FOR THE NONSENSE.

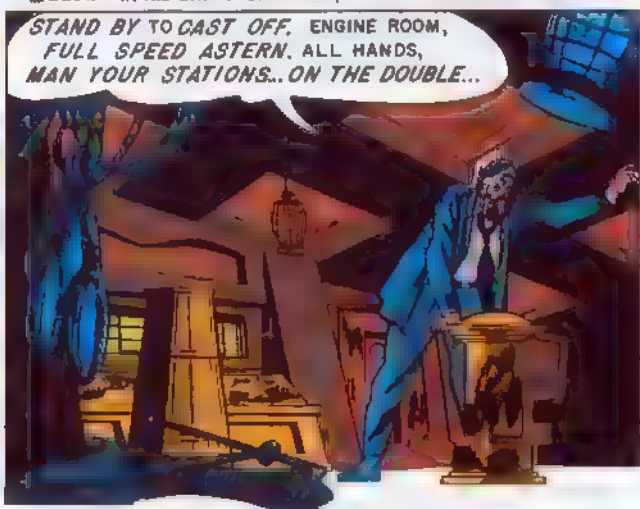
4,990 .. 5,000 DOLLARS. HERE YOU ARE, MR. GUNNER!

THANK YOU, MA'AM. I HOPE YOUR BROTHER IS HAPPY WITH THE JOB WE DID!



"BELOW" IN HIS SHIP'S QUARTERS, CAPTAIN JACKSON BELLOWED...

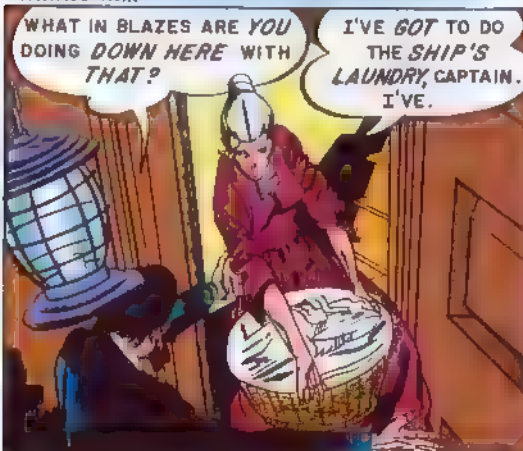
STAND BY TO CAST OFF. ENGINE ROOM, FULL SPEED ASTERN. ALL HANDS, MAN YOUR STATIONS...ON THE DOUBLE...



MILLY CAME "BELOW" CARRYING HER LAUNDRY BASKET FILLED WITH THE WASH SHE'D BEEN TAKING IN...

WHAT IN BLAZES ARE YOU DOING DOWN HERE WITH THAT?

I'VE GOT TO DO THE SHIP'S LAUNDRY, CAPTAIN. I'VE.



EZRA STRUCK OUT SAVAGELY...

YOU'LL DO THE LAUNDRY ON DECK, YOU SCULLION BEGGAR. GET OUT OF MY QUARTERS...

OWWWWWW...



WITH HER INVESTMENTS WIPED OUT AND THE INCOME FROM THEM GONE, MILLY HAD TO TAKE IN MORE WASH THAN SHE COULD HANDLE IN ORDER TO MEET EXPENSES. AND EZRA'S ABUSE BECAME WORSE AND WORSE...

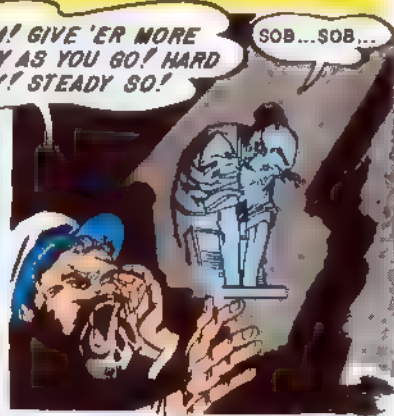
SCRUB OUT THAT HEAD, YOU FO'C'SLE DRUDGE!

Y-YES, CAPTAIN!

POOR MILLY WOULD ESCAPE, EVERY CHANCE SHE COULD GET, AND LOCK HERSELF IN THE UPSTAIRS BATHROOM IN ORDER TO DO THE WASH IN THE TUB. AND AS SHE SCRUBBED, SHE WOULD LISTEN TO EZRA'S RANTING AND RAVING...

EASE THE HELM! GIVE 'ER MORE RUDDER! STEADY AS YOU GO! HARD APORT! STEADY! STEADY SO!

SOB...SOB...



ONE HOT SUMMER'S DAY, EZRA STOOD AT THE OPEN PORT HOLE, SHOUTING OUT AT THE SEA-SCAPE SCENE BEYOND...

AHOY! AHOY THERE! SHIP AHOY! HOLD FAST. STAND BY!

WHILE UPSTAIRS, DIRECTLY OVER-HEAD IN THE BATHROOM, MILLY PANTED OVER A LOAD OF WASH...

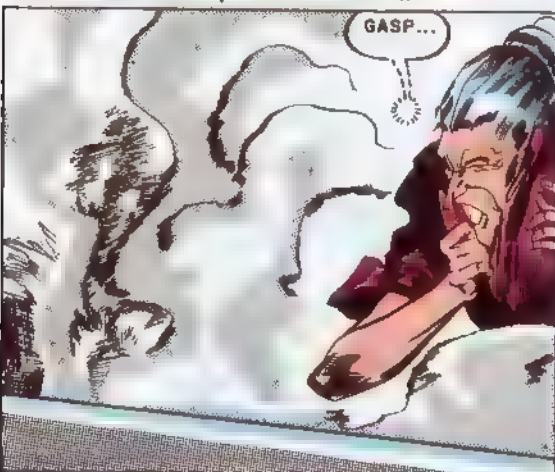
THE HOT WATER, RUNNING INTO THE TUB OVER THE SOAKING CLOTHES SENT UP CLOUDS OF STEAM WHICH FILLED THE LOCKED BATHROOM...



SUDDENLY MILLY CLUTCHED AT THE EXCRUCIATING PAIN IN HER CHEST, TOPPLING OVER...

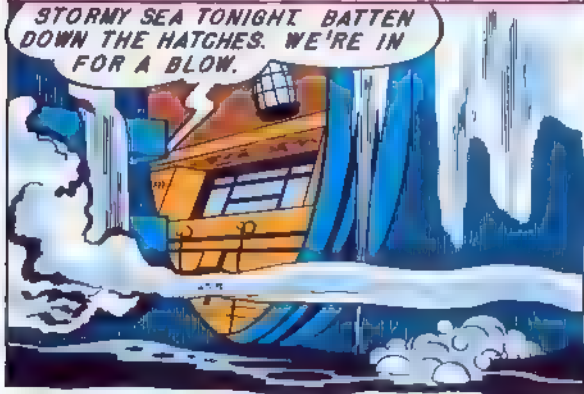
GASP...

AND AS HER HEART FAILED AND HER LIFE FADED WITH IT, THE BOILING WATER OVERFLOWED THE TUB, POOLING ABOUT HER PROSTRATE BODY, SINKING THROUGH THE BATHROOM FLOOR...



IN HIS CELLAR SHIP'S QUARTERS, CAPTAIN JACKSON LISTEN AS THE WATER, LEAKING DOWN FROM THE OVERFLOWING BATHTUB ABOVE, FILLED THE SPACE BETWEEN THE FALSE MAHOGANY paneled walls AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE HOUSE...

STORMY SEA TONIGHT BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES. WE'RE IN FOR A BLOW.



SUDDENLY, THE WATER BEGAN TO POUR THROUGH THE OPEN PORT HOLES...

ALL HANDS! ALL HANDS! WE'RE TAKING ON WATER! MAN THE BILGE PUMPS. SECURE THE BULWARKS...



THE CELLAR FILLED WITH STEAM. CAPTAIN JACKSON STAGGERED TO THE PORT HOLES, SLAMMED THEM SHUT. THE PRESSURE OF THE WATER CRUMBLED THE paneled WALLS...

ABANDON SHIP! WE'RE SINKING!



SLOWLY THE WATER ROSE IN THE CELLAR, BOILING, SCALDING, BLISTERING EZRA'S AGED BODY. BUT HE STUBBORNLY STOOD FAST...

ABANDON SHIP! THE CAPTAIN MUST REMAIN...



... UNTIL THE RISING HOT WATER REACHED HIS CHIN... HIS NECK... POURED INTO HIS MOUTH AND STEWED HIS TONGUE... HIS THROAT... HIS LUNGS...

GLUGG...
GLUGG...



HEE, HEE! YEP, KIDDIES. THAT'S MY MORBID MARINE OFFERING. EZRA FINALLY ENDED UP... IN HOT WATER! THIS IS THE FIRST CASE ON RECORD, BY THE WAY, OF A CAPTAIN GOING DOWN WITH HIS SHIP IN THE MIDDLE OF A KANSAS PRAIRIE... IN A CELLAR AND NOW, I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO THE OLD WITCH, WHO IS WAITING TO WIND UP MY REEK-RAG! REMEMBER! IF YOU'RE A FAN... AND AN ADDICT YOU'RE AN... E.C. FAN-ADDICT! AH... 'BYE, NOW!



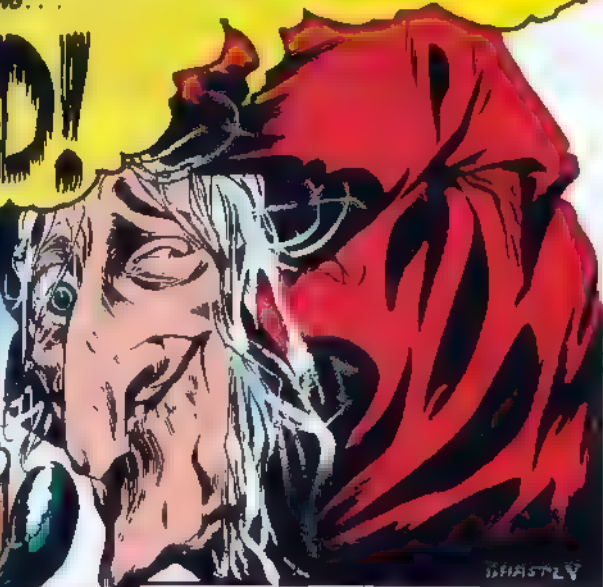
THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! AND NOW, IT'S **MORBID-MEAL-TIME**. WELCOME TO **THE HAUNT OF FEAR**, CREEPS. THIS IS YOUR **REVOLTING RESTAURATEUR**, **THE OLD WITCH**, READY TO **SLING SLIME**...AND **WIND UP C.K.'S MUCK-MAG** FOR **THIS IDIOTIC ISSUE**. CARE FOR SOME **SEA FOOD**? WELL, HERE'S A **TASTY TERROR TID-BIT** TO TURN YOUR STOMACH. I CALL THIS **SLOP-SERVING**...

WALF-BAKED!

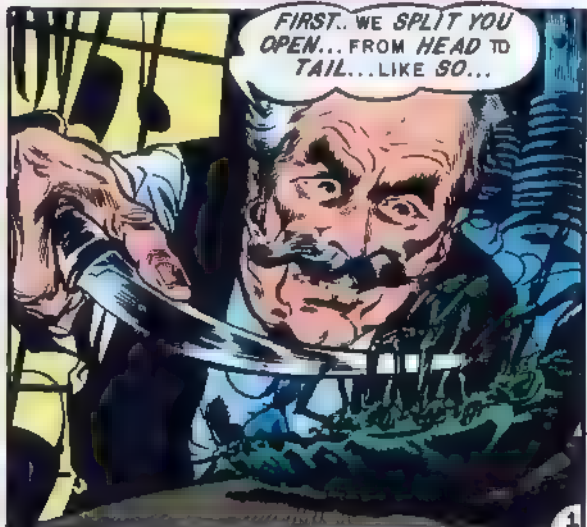
CALVIN DUGAN STOOD IN THE SPOTLESS KITCHEN OF 'THE SEA SHELL RESTAURANT' STARING IN MORBID FASCINATION AT THE SQUIRMING, BLUE-GREEN, SPINEY-LEGGED CLAWED CREATURES THAT SCRATCHED DRYLY AROUND AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BUTTER TUB. CAUTIOUSLY, HE REACHED IN AND PULLED ONE OF THEM FROM THE TUB, HOLDING IT UP. HE LAUGHED SADISTICALLY

YOU'RE NEXT, YOU DISGUSTING THING. NOW, NOW! DON'T STRUGGLE! IT'S NO USE! HEH, HEH!

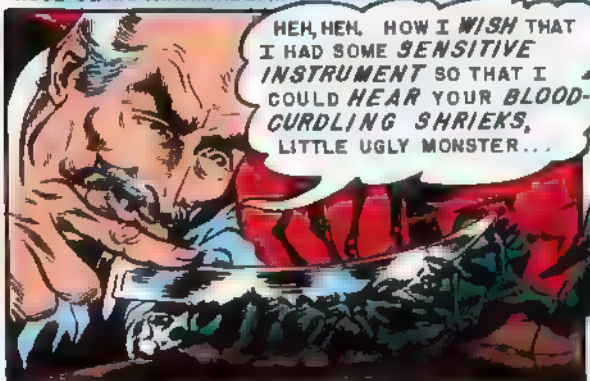


CALVIN REACHED FOR A KNIFE. HE PLACED THE STRUGGLING LOBSTER, BELLY UP, ON THE HUGE WOODEN KITCHEN TABLE AND GRINNED DOWN AT IT...

FIRST... WE SPLIT YOU OPEN... FROM HEAD TO TAIL... LIKE SO...



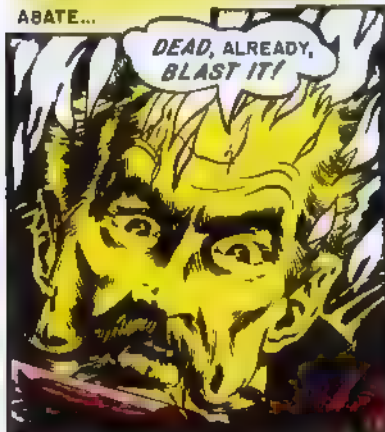
THE LOBSTER SQUIRMED. CALVIN FORCED THE KNIFE BLADE AGAINST ITS SOFT-SHELLED UNDERSIDE AND, WITH A SLIGHT SAWING MOTION, CRUNCHED IT THROUGH. THE LOBSTER, NOW PRACTICALLY SEVERED IN HALF, STILL WRIGGLED ITS SPINEY LEGS AND WAVED ITS HUGE CLAWS AWKWARDLY...



CALVIN MOVED THE THRASHING SPLIT LOBSTER ONTO A RACK AND SLID IT INTO THE STOVE, BELOW THE LICKING BLUE FLAMES OF THE BROILER...



CALVIN STARED INTO THE STOVE AT THE BROILING LOBSTER. HIS EYES GLINTED ALMOST MANIACALLY AS HE WATCHED ITS STRUGGLING ABATE...

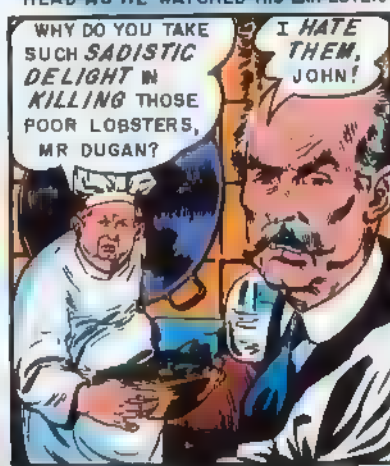


CALVIN GRINNED...

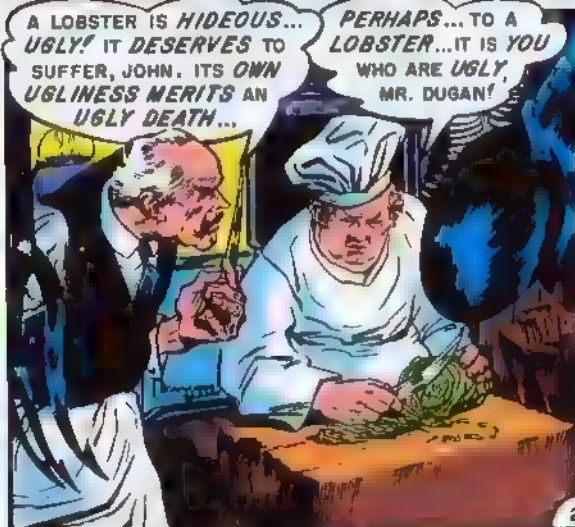
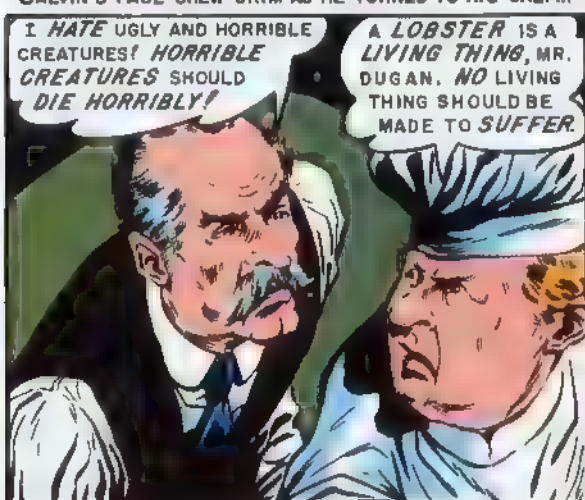
I MUST LOWER THE FLAME SO THAT THE NEXT ONE WILL DIE SLOWER!



BEHIND CALVIN, THE SEA SHELL RESTAURANT'S CHEF SHOOK HIS HEAD AS HE WATCHED HIS EMPLOYER.

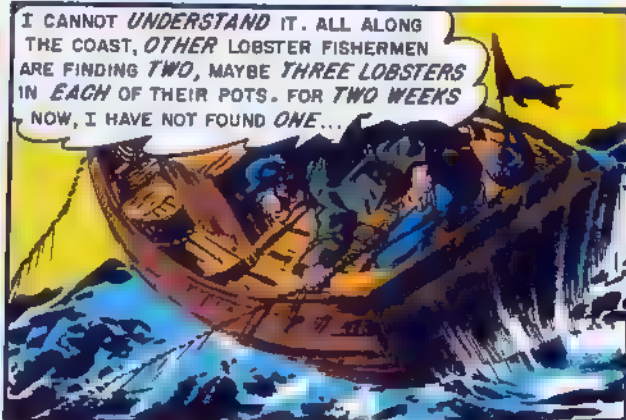


CALVIN'S FACE GREW GRIM AS HE TURNED TO HIS CHEF...



MEANWHILE, AT THAT VERY MOMENT, A FEW MILES UP THE SEACOAST FROM THE SEA SHELL RESTAURANT, A FISHERMAN GUIDED HIS INBOARD OVER THE TOSSING OCEAN SWELLS TO A CORK FLOAT FROM WHICH FLEW A TATTERED FLAG

THE FISHERMAN PULLED UP BESIDE THE BOBBING MARKER AND PULLED IT INTO HIS SEA SKIFF, SLOWLY, TEDIOUSLY, HE HAULED IN THE DRIPPING LINE THAT WAS FASTENED TO THE CORK FLOAT...



THE LAST ONE. IF THERE IS NOTHING IN THIS ONE, WE WILL HAVE NO MONEY FOR FOOD!

I CANNOT UNDERSTAND IT. ALL ALONG THE COAST, OTHER LOBSTER FISHERMEN ARE FINDING TWO, MAYBE THREE LOBSTERS IN EACH OF THEIR POTS. FOR TWO WEEKS NOW, I HAVE NOT FOUND ONE...

FINALLY, THE LOBSTER TRAP SURFACED, AND THE FOUL SCENT OF THE FISH HEAD, PLACED WITHIN IT AS BAIT, SEARED THE FISHERMAN'S NOSTRILS...

SADLY, THE FISHERMAN GUIDED HIS INBOARD BACK TO THE BEACH WHERE A WOMAN AND CHILD STOOD IN THE DOORWAY OF A WIND-SCARRED SHACK, WAITING...



EMPTY! ALL EMPTY! NOT ONE LOBSTER IN ANY OF MY POTS.

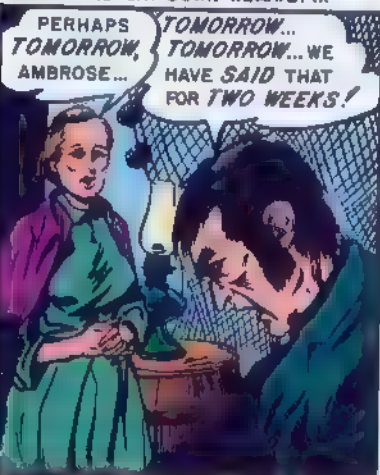


WELL, AMBROSE? ANY LUCK?

NOT A ONE, LUCY! NOT ONE LOBSTER! I CANNOT UNDERSTAND IT.

THE FISHERMAN ENTERED HIS DINGY SHACK AND SAT DOWN WEARILY...

THE CHILD BEGAN TO CRY.



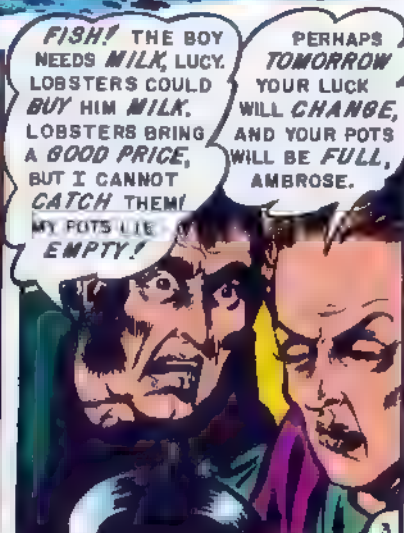
PERHAPS TOMORROW, AMBROSE...

TOMORROW... TOMORROW... WE HAVE SAID THAT FOR TWO WEEKS!



POPPA...SOB... I AM HUNGRY.

I WILL MAKE THE BOY SOME FISH, AMBROSE.



FISH! THE BOY NEEDS MILK, LUCY. LOBSTERS COULD BUY HIM MILK. LOBSTERS BRING A GOOD PRICE, BUT I CANNOT CATCH THEM! MY POTS ARE EMPTY!

PERHAPS TOMORROW YOUR LUCK WILL CHANGE, AND YOUR POTS WILL BE FULL, AMBROSE.

THE SEA SHELL RESTAURANT WAS NOTED FOR ITS BROILED LOBSTER. PEOPLE CAME FROM MILES AROUND TO FEAST ON THE SUCCULENT WHITE MEAT DIPPED IN BUTTER SAUCE. CALVIN DUGAN DID A THRIVING BUSINESS...

THE LOBSTER WAS ESPECIALLY TASTY TODAY, MR. DUGAN.

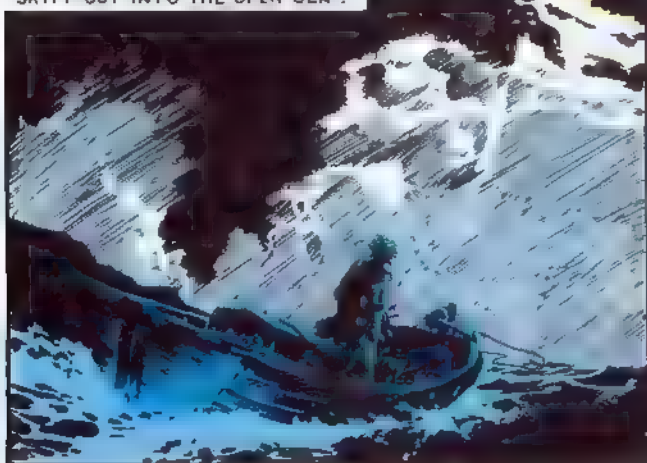
THANK YOU, MR. HINES. GOOD EVENING. COME AGAIN...



JOHN NODDED AND LEFT. CALVIN LISTENED AS THE CAR MOTORS ECHOED AWAY INTO THE NIGHT, THEN TURNED TO THE ALMOST EMPTY TUB...



THE INBOARD MOTOR COUGHED AND SPUTTERED, THEN BEGAN TO HUM EVENLY. CALVIN GUIDED THE SKIFF OUT INTO THE OPEN SEA.



AFTER CLOSING TIME THAT NIGHT, JOHN, THE CHEF, REMINDED CALVIN.

WE'RE GETTING LOW ON LOBSTERS, MR. DUGAN. IF WE HAVE A GOOD CROWD TOMORROW, WE'LL RUN OUT!

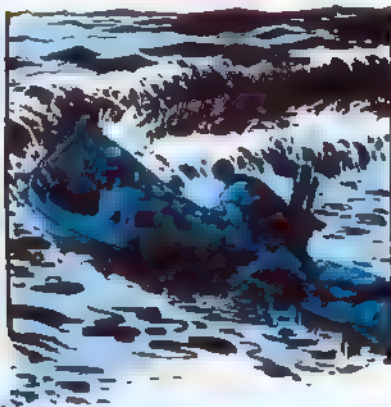
I'LL PICK SOME UP IN THE MORNING... ON THE WAY IN! GOOD-NIGHT, JOHN.



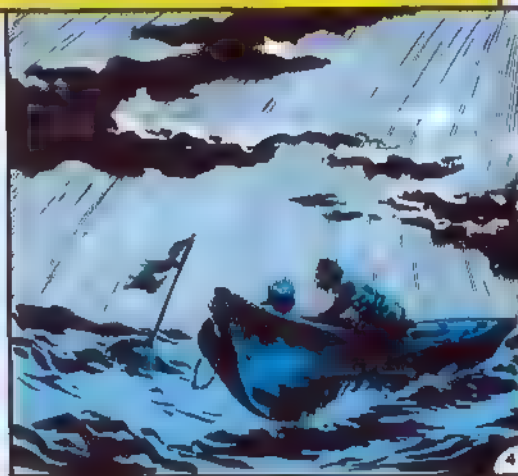
AFTER A WHILE, CALVIN LEFT THE RESTAURANT. HE LOCKED UP CAREFULLY, BUT HE DID NOT GET INTO HIS CAR. INSTEAD, HE WALKED DOWN TO THE BEACH...



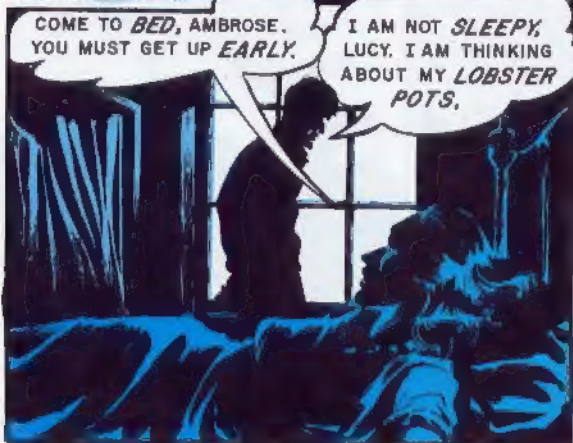
HE MOVED DOWN THE BEACH TO WHERE A SEA SKIFF WAS MOORED. UNTYING IT, CALVIN PUSHED THE CRAFT INTO THE ONGOING BREAKERS.



A FEW MILES OUT, HE PULLED UP BESIDE A BOBBING MARKER FROM WHICH A TATTERED FLAG FLAPPED...



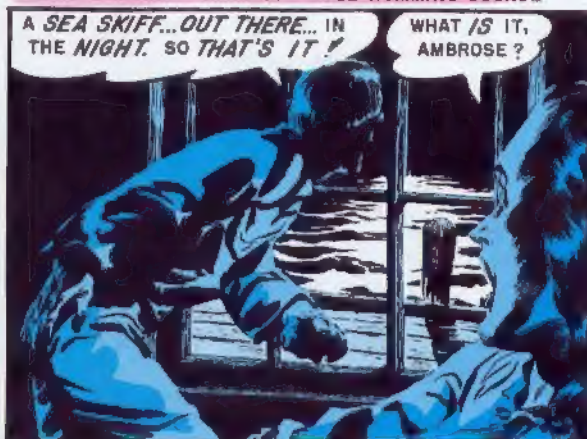
AMBROSE, THE LOBSTER FISHERMAN, PACED THE FLOOR OF HIS DINGY SHACK. LUCY, HIS WIFE, WATCHED HIM WITH SAD EYES...



COME TO BED, AMBROSE. YOU MUST GET UP EARLY.

I AM NOT SLEEPY, LUCY. I AM THINKING ABOUT MY LOBSTER POTS.

AMBROSE STOPPED PACING. HE LISTENED. FAR AWAY, OVER THE ROAR OF THE SURF POUNDING THE NEARBY BEACH, AMBROSE HEARD A SOUND... A DULL HUMMING SOUND...



A SEA SKIFF... OUT THERE... IN THE NIGHT. SO THAT'S IT!

WHAT IS IT, AMBROSE?

AMBROSE POINTED OUT TO SEA... OUT TO THE DISTANT TOSsing SWELLS...

SOMEONE'S OUT THERE. THAT'S WHY MY LOBSTER POTS ARE ALWAYS EMPTY. SOMEONE IS STEALING MY LOBSTERS.



AMBROSE! WAIT!

AMBROSE WAS OUT OF THE DOOR OF HIS WEATHER BEATEN SHACK IN A FLASH...

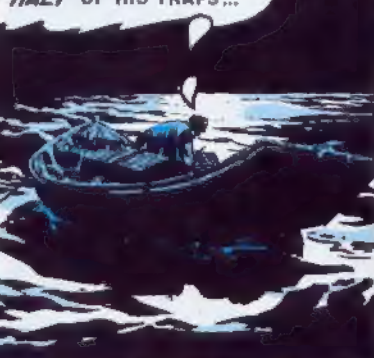
AMBROSE! COME BACK!



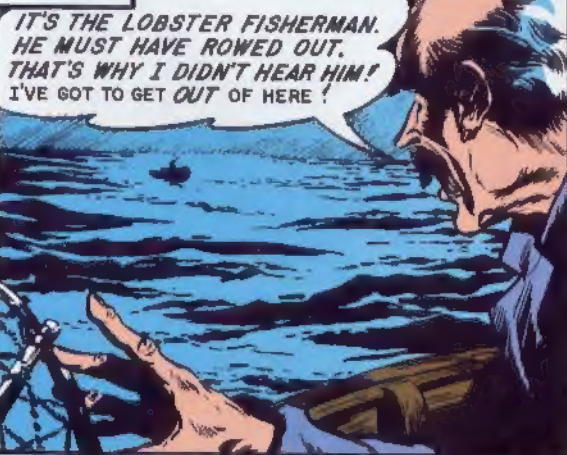
I'LL GET HIM, LUCY! I'LL GET HIM!

FAR OUT ON THE MOONLIT WAVES, CALVIN DUGAN LIFTED A LOBSTER POT INTO HIS SEA SKIFF...

TWO BEAUTIES! THAT'S SEVENTEEN ALREADY AND I'VE ONLY RAIDED HALF OF HIS TRAPS...

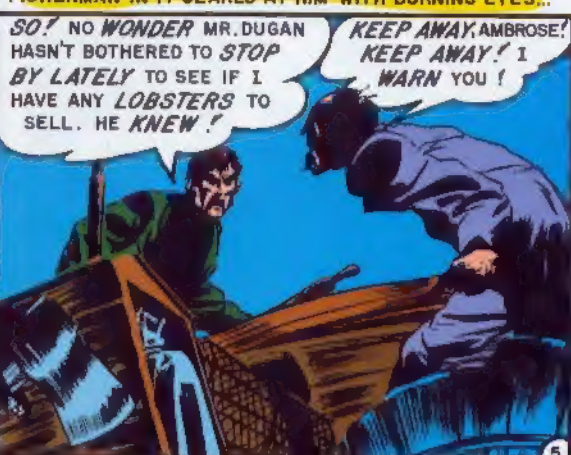


SUDDENLY CALVIN LOOKED UP. SCARCELY ONE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, ANOTHER SEA SKIFF GLIDED TOWARD HIM SILENTLY...



IT'S THE LOBSTER FISHERMAN. HE MUST HAVE ROWED OUT. THAT'S WHY I DIDN'T HEAR HIM! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

CALVIN STRUGGLED WITH HIS INBOARD, TRYING TO START IT. THE OTHER SEA SKIFF PULLED ALONGSIDE. THE FISHERMAN IN IT GLARED AT HIM WITH BURNING EYES...



SO! NO WONDER MR. DUGAN HASN'T BOTHERED TO STOP BY LATELY TO SEE IF I HAVE ANY LOBSTERS TO SELL. HE KNEW!

KEEP AWAY, AMBROSE! KEEP AWAY! I WARN YOU!

AMBROSE SNARLED...



YOU UGLY THIEF!
YOU HIDEOUS MONSTER!
YOU, MY CHILD HAS GONE
WITHOUT MILK AND
MEAT AND CLOTHES
BECAUSE OF YOU!

I'LL PAY
YOU,
AMBROSE!
I'LL PAY...

AMBROSE SCREAMED...



PAY ME!? NEVER!
I'M GOING TO REPORT
YOU TO THE POLICE.
THEY'LL THROW
YOU IN JAIL, WHERE
YOU BELONG!

DON'T BE
A FOOL,
AMBROSE!
I'LL PAY
YOU WELL
TO FORGET
THIS!

NO! I WON'T TAKE
YOUR MONEY! IT'S
JAIL FOR YOU...
JAIL...

YOU
FORCE
ME TO DO
THIS,
AMBROSE!



THE KNIFE BLADE IN CALVIN DUGAN'S HAND
GLINTED IN THE MOONLIGHT...



NOW, I'LL HAVE TO KILL YOU,
AMBROSE... TO KEEP YOU
FROM TALKING...

AMBROSE'S SHRIEK ECHOED ACROSS THE HEAVING WATER
AS CALVIN PLUNGED THE KNIFE INTO HIS WRITHING BODY
AGAIN AND AGAIN...



THEN, CALVIN LASHED AMBROSE INTO HIS SEA SKIFF...



... AND CHOPPED A HOLE IN THE FLOORBOARDS, LETTING
THE SEA WATER IN...



SLOWLY, THE BOAT, WITH AMBROSE'S BODY, SANK BELOW THE TOSSING OCEAN WAVES...



CALVIN STARTED HIS INBOARD AND GUIDED HIS SEA SKIFF BACK TO THE BEACH...



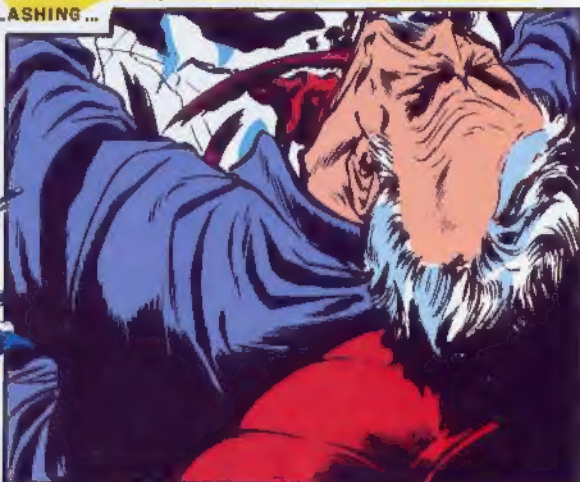
...AND LOADED THE BUTTERTUB WITH THE STOLEN LOBSTERS INTO HIS CAR TRUNK...



HE'D STARTED HOME...ROARING DOWN THE COAST ROAD AT BREAKNECK SPEED ...WHEN THE BLOW-OUT OCCURRED...



AS CALVIN'S LURCHING CAR SPUN OVER, THE STEERING WHEEL SHATTERED, RIPPING INTO HIS BODY...TEARING... SLASHING ...



HE LAY THERE, PINNED, SQUIRMING, HIS BODY ALMOST SPLIT IN TWO, AS THE OVERTURNED CAR CAUGHT FIRE AND THE FLAMES LICKED AT HIM AND HE SCREAMED AND SHRIEKED AND WAS BROILED ALIVE...



HEE, HEE! THAT'S MY STORY, KIDDIES! CALVIN ENDED UP LIKE THE LOBSTERS HE'D BEEN STEALING. WHEN I CAME UPON HIS BURNING CAR, HE WAS JUST ABOUT DONE. I WAS SO MAD. THERE WASN'T A DROP OF BUTTER SAUCE AROUND! AND TALKING ABOUT SAUCE, YOU'D BETTER HURRY UP AND JOIN US E.C. FAN-ADDICTS! BUT REMEMBER, MEMBERSHIP IS LIMITED TO 250,000,000 PEOPLE. SO DON'T LOSE OUT! GET BACK ISSUES OF OUR PERVERTED PERIODICALS



AND WRITE TO THE CREEP-KEEPER AND LET HIM KNOW WHAT YOU THINK OF OUR BOOK... FOR DETAILS, READ C.K.'S COLUMN!



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